

The Vigil of the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord
St. John 1:1-14
December 24th, 2024
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

The Word Was God

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Sermon Text:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

My dear friends, we have reached the eve of the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord. We call this night a “vigil” because, like the Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord, the Church has always gathered as early as possible to celebrate this great Feast Day. Many would gather the night before the Mass and wait in vigil for the time when the celebration of our Lord’s incarnation would begin. At their vigil they would light and hold lamps, both so that they could see, and also to represent the Light of the world coming into the world. This is why the eve of the Mass of the Christ, Christmas as it has become to be known, is celebrated with lighted candles. We join our celebration to the celebration of the saints who have come before us with our own lit candles as we await the celebration of our Lord’s incarnation in our flesh at His birth.

The celebrations of the world focus on a baby boy born in Bethlehem to St. Joseph and the Virgin Mary. In many cases, His birth is treated like any other birth. People sing “Happy Birthday” and bake Him a cake, as if He is getting another year older. People “ooh” and “ahh” at the spectacle of a baby wrapped up in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. Much time is spent in the Gospel of the Evangelist St. Luke, the second chapter, where he records the history surrounding our Lord’s birth. We will do the same tomorrow morning. But historically the Church has not had St. Luke’s Gospel as its primary Christmas text. It has had as its Gospel reading for this night the Gospel from the Apostle and Evangelist St. John, which we have heard read a little while ago.

Why does the Church not focus on the infant birth on this night? Because St. John gets directly to the point. St. Matthew, the Apostle and Evangelist, and St. Luke give us the circumstances of our Lord’s earthly birth. But St. John’s Gospel skips over the earthly birth of our Lord to His eternal birth. St. Augustine, in a sermon on this text, said that the Lord + Jesus had two births. He said it like this, “There are two births of our Lord + Jesus Christ, the one divine, the other human.... Consider that first begetting: ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.’ Whose Word? The Father’s own. Which Word? The Son Himself. The Father has never been without the Son; and yet the One Who has never been without the Son begot the Son. He both begot and yet did not begin to do so. There is no beginning for one begotten without beginning. And yet He is the Son, and

yet He is begotten. A mere human is going to say, 'How is it that He is begotten, and yet He does not have a beginning? If He does not have a beginning, how was He begotten?' How, I do not know. Are you asking a mere human how God was begotten? I am overwhelmed by your questioning, but I appeal to the prophet: 'His begetting who can tell the tale of?' (Is. 53:8)" Thus far St. Augustine.

This is the great mystery that the Church hears about tonight. He Who is born in our flesh to the Virgin Mary on this night at midnight; He Who is wrapped up in swaddling cloths and laid in a manger; He Who shepherds come to worship and adore is the One Who was with God from the beginning. Not only was He with God, but contrary to those false teachers who would deny His Divinity, He was also the Lord God. He is the Second Person of the Trinity. He is the Word of God made man. He is God! As St. John began his Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This was the manner of His eternal birth. Or, to say it properly, this is the manner of how He was begotten of the Lord God. He has no beginning and no end, but yet He is begotten. How this can be, I, like St. Augustine, do not know. No human can know such a mystery.

But at the same time this is the mystery that the Church celebrates tonight. We celebrate that our Lord + Jesus was eternally begotten of the Father. Why does it matter? Why do we celebrate this great mystery? It is to establish the fact that if our Lord + Jesus, the Christ, is not begotten eternally of the Father, then His earthly birth means nothing. He is, as many seem to think, just another baby born. Certainly, born in humble and lowly circumstances. Certainly, born in a remarkable fashion. But if the Lord + Jesus is not the Lord God, Who is begotten of the Father before all worlds, He is just another baby, and not really worthy of our praise and adoration.

This is why the Church on this night of vigil, as we wait with lighted candles for the Mass of the Christ, turns her focus to the reason why this Baby Boy born to the Blessed Virgin Mary is worthy of all praise, honor, and worship. All praise belongs to Him because He is the Eternal God born in our flesh. He Who has no beginning and no end, Who is eternal, is born in our flesh. He has become man. He Who was begotten of the Father before all worlds, is now born of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This is why our Lord + Jesus deserves to be worshipped and adored. This is why we celebrate this night. We do not just celebrate an earthly birth of our Lord + Jesus. We do not just celebrate the birth of another Jewish Boy. No, my dear friends, we celebrate that the Lord God has chosen to become one of us. He chooses to be made man. He chooses to be incarnate into our flesh.

The Eternal Lord God has taken on frail flesh, but He is without sin. The sinless Son of the Lord God dwelling in our flesh has come down from Heaven to redeem mankind from their sins and trespasses. No man could make satisfaction for his own sins. The Gospel does not belong to those who imagine that the righteousness that the Lord God requires for salvation is found within them. There is only sin and death to be found in us. There is only darkness and doom to be found in us. We have the proof at every funeral. The body that at one time enjoyed a joyous birth now lies in a casket placed in a grave. Such is the wages and penalty of death. No man is able to save himself from such a fate.

No man that is but the One Man Who is both the Lord God and Man. Our Lord + Jesus, the Christ, is the Lord God. He is fully the Lord God, begotten of the Father from eternity. But He is also eternal Himself. "In the beginning was the Word." The Word, that is, our Lord + Jesus, is eternal. He is from the beginning, which means He is eternal. Our language is incapable of expressing His eternal nature, except with the words, "In the beginning." He is in the beginning, and also from the beginning is with the Lord God, the heavenly Father, and the Holy Ghost. They are ever One God, world without end. Our Lord + Jesus was in the beginning with God, and He is God. Therefore, He has power to redeem mankind.

He must do this, however, as a man. Therefore, He is incarnate in our flesh. He is born of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and is made man. As a man, He can perfectly fulfill the Law of God. As a man,

He can offer His life as a ransom for ours. He can pay our penalty for sin, by hanging upon a tree until He dies. The Lord God incarnate can suffer and die as a man in order to redeem mankind from their sins. And being both God and Man the Lord + Jesus can also rise again from the dead. He can lay down His life, and He can take it up again. We have the proof given to us this night of the Lord's earthly birth. For if the Lord God can dwell in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, as a helpless infant, certainly He can raise Himself from the dead.

Furthermore, my dear friends, if our Lord + Jesus, the Christ, can do these things to Himself, how much more will He do them for us. This is why the Light of the world comes into this world filled with darkness on this night. It is why we hold our candles representing the Light come into the world. For our Lord + Jesus dispels the darkness and gloom of death. He comes to bring light in the darkness, and He comes to bring life in the midst of death. Darkness and death have no power where He dwells and reigns. Sin and death have no power where He has been made incarnate. For our Lord + Jesus shows His power over all things on this night. He Who was with God and is the Lord God, comes to us His people as one of us. He is born in our flesh to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and is wrapped up in swaddling cloths, and laid in a manger. But this earthly birth is only important if He is also begotten of the Father from eternity.

Therefore, my dear friends, as we wait in vigil with lighted candles, we celebrate this night the two births of our Lord + Jesus. We celebrate His earthly birth, but more importantly we celebrate that He was begotten of the heavenly Father from eternity. For He Who was begotten of the Father is fully the Lord God, and He Who is wrapped up in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger is also fully man, born of the Virgin Mary. Let us give thanks and praise that our Lord + Jesus has come to us this night as both the Lord God and man. Let us bend the knee at the words, "And was made man" in the Creed. For, we would have no Savior, no Redeemer, if our Lord God had not come to dwell with us as a man. "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the Only-begotten from the Father,) full of grace and truth." Thanks be to our Lord, for it is because of this reason that we can have a very merry Christmas. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!